

Friendship Heights TMD Advisory Committee Meeting

Summary – Meeting of January 8, 2008

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Voting Members Present

Bob Cope (Chair)	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Leonard Grant	Friendship Heights Village Council
N. Leslie Olson	Chevy Chase Land Company
Carlean Russell	Saks Fifth Avenue (Employer of greater than 50)
Robert Schwarzbart	Friendship Heights Village Council
Jeffrey Slavin	Town of Somerset
R. Mallory Starr	Somerset House Management Association
Garry Tyran	Eagle Bank (Employers of fewer than 50)

Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra Brecher	DPWT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
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TMD Staff Present

Jim Carlson	DPWT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
David Kantor	DPWT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

Absent

Jessica Adams (Vice Chair)	The JBG Companies
Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Mary Herman	Polinger Shannon and Luchs (Employer of greater than 50)
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Charles Kines	M-NCPPC
Gregory Knoop	Oudens + Knoop Architects (Employer of fewer than 50)
Steven Robins, Esq.	Lerch, Early and Brewer, Representing Wisconsin Place
Kenneth Williams	GEICO

Guests

Afua Ofori	Attending for Mary Herman – Polinger Shannon & Luchs
Stuart Barr	Attending for Steven Robins – Lerch, Early & Brewer
William Frick	Montgomery County Delegate, District 16
Julian Mansfield	Village of Friendship Heights
Bill McCloskey	Brookdale Resident
Cleo Tavani	Friendship Heights Village Civic Association

Items 1, 2, & 3 – Introductions, Review/Approval of Minutes, Chair's Comments: Members and guests introduced themselves. December's minutes were approved without changes.

Chairman Bob Cope asked **Sandra Brecher** when the Commuter Store could be expected to open. January had been the expected opening date.

Ms. Brecher stated that the lease is still pending and thus Commuter Services has not taken possession of the store. She added that she would be walking through the space to assess whether it was ready to be turned over to CSS after the lease is signed. Once Commuter Services takes possession of the space, however, there will still be additional interior finishing work needed. It may be possible to provide a meeting space for the Advisory Committee without having the store fully operational.

Item 6 – Follow-up Letter to MSHA (moved ahead on agenda to allow for the arrival of Del. Frick): **Jim Carlson** provided background information regarding the follow-up letter to Maryland State Highway Administration regarding pedestrian safety issues along Wisconsin Avenue. **Mr. Carlson** suggested that the group vote on the principle points of the letter and he would send out a draft for wordsmithing and comments.

The committee had in a previous meeting discussed adding the Barlow Building and the Medical Center Building at 5530 and 5454 Wisconsin Avenue as areas of concern. These buildings are very large contributors to pedestrian traffic. The letter suggests that video studies be conducted at the crosswalks in front of these buildings in addition to the study previously requested for the intersection of Willard and Wisconsin Avenues. A motion to approve the letter was made and seconded.

Item 5 – FY09 Operating Budget Meeting with County Executive: **Mr. Cope** stated that the meeting with the County Executive is scheduled for the end of February, so there is one more meeting of the Advisory Committee before the presentation to County Executive Leggett.

Mr. Cope asked that members review the FY08 budget priorities (included in the meeting packet), along with last year's letter, for any suggested changes.

Ms. Brecher noted that for Fare Share/Super Fare Share, the Federal maximum has increased to \$115 per month. Art Holmes has authorized the County to match the incremental increase.

Mr. Cope suggested returning to **Item 4** and then continuing on to **Item 5**.

Item 4 – Pedestrian Safety: Members and guests once again introduced themselves for **Delegate William Frick**. **Mr. Frick** discussed the Montgomery County Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee, which he now chairs. The committee plays two roles: One role is a 'traditional' advisory committee, which provides input and advice to the County Executive; a secondary role is to function as a public advocacy group for pedestrian safety. **Mr. Frick** stated he was interested in the TMD Advisory Committee's pedestrian safety concerns.

Mr. Cope expressed his concern regarding the lack of uniformity with countdown timers – every one of the timers in Montgomery County seems to work differently. Because Maryland is one of the few states that has statutes regarding "contributory negligence," Mr. Cope feels this should be a significant concern. (Under contributory negligence, the accident victim's failure to exercise due care which contributes even in the slightest way to plaintiff injuries -- e.g., stepping into a crosswalk after the "Don't Walk" signal begins flashing -- means that they are completely barred from recovering any damages in Maryland courts.)

Robert Schwarzbart discussed his concerns regarding the intersection at Willard and Wisconsin Avenues. Especially with the increased development, pedestrian safety will be dependent on how well the traffic is controlled.

Mr. Cope added that in December's meeting MSHA traffic engineer Anyesha Mookherjee said the State would be studying the possibility of installing a left turn arrow at Wisconsin and Willard.

Ms. Brecher reminded the group that pedestrian signage is often difficult to place in or around intersections, since the general guidance used by traffic engineers is that any sign in the cone of vision of drivers that is not intended for them could confuse them.

Mr. Carlson added that the standard pedestrian speed taken into account when configuring the countdown timers is four feet per second. And while as a result of recent changes to the County's and State's standards this figure will decrease to around 3.5 feet per second, there are still a number of people who cannot move that quickly.

In regard to the pedestrian fatalities in Montgomery County last year, **Mr. Frick** said that a number of them could be attributed to pedestrian error. He noted that the County Executive had monies set aside for a pedestrian education initiative and the occasional pedestrian sting in areas where there is a higher incidence of ignoring crosswalks and signals. **Mr. Frick** also said that the State keeps records of all background information in terms of pedestrian fatalities, including cost analyses.

Mr. Schwarzbart suggested the possibility of posting signs notifying motorists that there are cameras viewing the intersections to help prevent the running of red lights. No camera need be in place to accomplish the same effect. **Cleo Tavani** responded by saying that there is a significant amount of pedestrian error involved in vehicle/pedestrian collisions, which is possibly a more frequent contributor to accidents than driver error. **Ms. Tavani** added that pedestrian education needs to be made a very high priority, in addition to the need for increased enforcement, such as ticketing jaywalkers.

Jeffrey Slavin added that in other jurisdictions pedestrians avoid jaywalking out of fear of receiving a ticket; but in Montgomery County most pedestrians have no fear of a fine.

Item 5 Revisited – FY09 Operating Budget Meeting with County Executive: The County's recent hiring freeze was discussed. **Ms. Brecher** stated that exemptions from the freeze have been granted on occasion when the need was warranted. **Mr. Cope** suggested that the wording in Priority 1 be changed to reflect a request for "adequate TMD staffing," rather than the phrase "increase TMD staffing."

Mr. Cope would also like to re-order the priorities, so that improving Ride On service is a higher priority than continued funding of Fare Share and Super Fare Share. **Ms. Brecher** noted that funding for all of the Fare Share programs is not secure and should not be overlooked. **Mr. Cope** stated that Ride On service should at least be maintained at its present level, if not improved, and it is the committee's belief that this should be a higher priority than Fare Share. **Mr. Cope** would like the rest of the priorities to remain the same.

Mr. Slavin asked how many people would be affected by improving Ride On as opposed to how many would be affected by increasing funding for Fare Share. Since one of the objectives of the committee is to take as many cars off the road as possible, if improving Ride On does not reduce the number of motorists, then Mr. Slavin feels the committee should keep Fare Share as the number 2 priority.

Mr. Cope stated he would also like to ensure the opening and adequate staffing of the Commuter Store, and in conjunction with providing adequate TMD staffing, this should be the number 1 priority. In short, the new priorities will be:

1. Provide Adequate TMD Staffing
2. Improve Ride On Service
3. Enhance Pedestrian Safety
4. Continued funding of Fare Share/Super Fare Share

Ms. Brecher stated that we do not necessarily need to put dollar amounts on projected needs, but the committee could suggest where it would like the newly collected TMD fees to be allocated. **Ms. Brecher** will bring numbers to the next meeting in terms of how much was collected in FY07 and what is projected for FY08.

Item 7 – Other Business: There was additional discussion regarding the location of the taxi call button, the fact that pedestrians and taxis are both in the area in significant numbers but not in the new waiting area, and next steps.

One of the problems noted with the Willard taxi stand is that there are about 10 or 11 taxis standing with no riders. It is apparent that most are awaiting dispatch. **Ms. Brecher** noted that given the concern with the various factors involved, the committee could recommend the Department continue the experiment and collecting data, while other approaches are used to try to educate the taxi drivers as to where to go. If pedestrians and taxis are both acting as had been originally envisioned, then taxi drivers will get their fares.

Mr. Cope stated that the County should enforce the 4 taxi limit in the Willard stand. Before extending the call button experiment or deeming it a failure, this needs to be done. Motion to request DPWT to enforce this limit was seconded and approved.

Meeting adjourned at 10:05

Next meeting date: February 12, 2008